

Jas Hook at Eton,

or The Solitary

With but moderate success I have been trying lately to collect some facts about the early days of Jas Hook, the pirate captain, an "old boy" of whom Eton has preserved few traditions. In no accepted book of reference have I found his name mentioned, nor should we know even that he had been an Etonian but for the statement "Eton and Balliol" in a work that is largely fanciful.

On this same doubtful authority we learn that his last words were "Floreat Etona"; if this was so they became him better than any of his other words, for let us admit that Hook in his glory was no Sir Galahad. I read that there is in contemplation a life of Hook in two volumes, 8vo, which, after the fashion of today, will put a gloss upon his deeds, but I have no such intention here; my sole object is to record the few details I have gathered about the youth of a misguided though brilliant man who at the last seems to have been true to his old school.

Of Hook at Balliol I may say that I know almost nothing, have pursued no inquiries into his life there, and leave that virgin soil to any son of the college who is filially inclined. Hook was certainly in residence at Balliol for several years and a clever (?) undergraduate informs me that in the old library lists (no longer kept) there are slips showing that one of that name did take out a number of books, all of them, oddly enough, poetry and mostly of the Lake School. A red query against these volumes indicates that they were never returned to the library, and my young friend assures me that at an Oxford secondhand bookshop, he lately bought one with the arms of the college



obliterated by a knife, and "James Hook, his book" inserted in their place. Thus even in those days Hook was already the student. Athletically he was not especially notable, and there is a curious tradition that when hurt on the football field he "bled yellow." The best thing he did in sports appears to have been that he was 12th man in the college hundred yards. He left Balliol hurriedly but I have not discovered for what cause, the page in the books of the college which must have recorded the happening having been torn out.

This indeed is a misfortune that has dogged his fame and added considerably to my difficulty in tracing him. Thus as I shall show that I have proof that in his last year in school he was a member of what is perhaps the most exalted assemblage in the world, the Eton Society or Pop. Various explanations of this term have been advanced, but I think it probably derives from pop guns to which the members when fully dressed bear an interesting resemblance. The Pops are the chief sight of Eton and parade on great occasions in sock and slip, arms linked, six or eight abreast and two yards in front of God. The page recording Hook's election has been removed mysteriously from the ledger. Legend (always untrustworthy) says that his election was a surprise to everyone, especially to the members, who alone have the right of voting, and can only be accounted for by his having cleverly manipulated the ballot box. But even if so, what ardour to excel, how indomitable is the particle, Man. Again, Hook was captain of the cricket XI of his house, and this entailed



his writing, in a tome kept for the purpose, and preserved through the ages, a chronicle of his captaincy and a salutation to his successes. Such a manuscript in his own writing would now of course be of high value, but I have carefully examined the volume and Hook's year is missing. On the other hand, I found him referred to twice by his predecessor, who says of one match: "J. Hook's blob is what might happen to any one, but he must learn to restrain himself when given out l.b.w", and in another page, the boyish tribute: "this was the game in which J. H ook did the dirty."

James also certainly edited the Eton Chronicle for a brief period (resigning over some item obscurely connected with half a crown), but once again the official proof has gone. At an earlier date he produced (or at least contributed to) one of the journals of original matter known locally (one wonders why) as Ephemerals. His paper in the latter, which lies before me as I write and is entitled "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig," seems to me to be of merit, yet for some reason that baffles me the printers (at the request of his tutor) refused to pay him for it. For some time I suspected that this frequent suppression of James could only be explained in one of two ways, either the authorities destroyed intentionally the proofs of his connection with Eton because they thought his career (meteoric as it was) reflected (on the whole) no credit on the school, or those pages, long after the writing of them, were abstracted by autograph hunters. I have since discovered the true reason, surely



one of the most sombre tales in the history of Eton. This shall be set forth in its proper place.

Mention of the Eton Chronicle reminds me of an incident which will go like an arrow to the hearts of all Etonians, past and present. It is this, that after the fateful affairs culminating in James's decease, a search, made in the cabin of his brig, brought to light that throughout the years of his piracy he had been a faithful subscriber to the Eton Chronicle. Hundreds of copies of it, much thumb-marked, were found, littering his bunk.

Of James's personal appearance while at Eton such notes as I have gathered are picturesque but contradictory. According to his aunt (of whom I shall have more to say) he was a sweetly pretty boy and pious, with much of the courtliness which afterwards so struck his victims on the high seas, when he always said "sorry" as he prodded them along the plank. "The soul of honor" she said also, and so sensitive, that on his going to Eton she urged his tutor never in any circumstances to cane James, but to do as she had done, cane some adjacent piece of furniture, which had the same effect on the pants of the impressionable boy. This advice was not adopted, and she feels that the harsher treatment fretted his dark spirit.

The few of his contemporaries whom I have had the privilege of consulting were impressed less favorably. They admit an air of cheap distinction, of which he seemsto have been pleasantly conscious. But chiefly they recall a lad, not over cleanly, inclined to snivel and to twist the arms of delicate juniors



untruthful and a glutton. "He oozed so unpleasantly through his clothes," writes one, "that in the Wall Game, if you pushed him against the wall, you smeared it with him." This unusual trait is probably what others mean when they speak of the peculiar clamminess of his touch "which sent a shiver through us if we shook hands with him," and it may also refer to that blood of his, which they described as "yellow after the colour has gone out of it." This, I am informed, saved him many tannings by the head of the house who had fainted at first sight of it, as James knew and bragged about it. When in want of funds he used to cut himself slightly for threepence and considerably for a strawberry more. His piety, said his detractors, was merely that he prayed unctuously not to be found out in certain nefarious actions. He also prayed for victory in games, which was considered ungentlemanly by his opponents.

Eton boys, until they are put upon an allowance, have themselves so much photographed that the cost must be equal to the rent of a roomy cottage in the country. Nevertheless I found a difficulty in securing a photograph of James. I wrote to an Eton master asking if he could obtain one for me, saying I knew it was customary for boys on leaving to bequeath a selection of their photographs and hazarding the suggestion that when the turn came for the master to depart he did not take these with him but left them behind in sacks. He replied that this was far from <sup>being</sup> the case, but he also unfortunately informed his pupils of my request, with the result that many of them, seeking a momentary



prominence, sent me their own photographs, with "Yours truly, Jas. Hook" written underneath. This left an impression on me that possibly James might have come to a more reputable if less striking end had he been entered for some other school, a view that is shared by his aunt, from whom I got the dainty little picture of her nephew that accompanies this article. As the cognoscenti will note it represents him in his scug period.

I found James's aunt to be a tiny delightful lady, as neat as a bird, and with the sprightliness that comes of having ceased to be a schoolmistress. She received me in her ivy-clad cottage near Gomshall and prefers to be spoken of in print very simply as Miss xxx. She was most amusing and twitted me about the well-known Scottish lack of humour, quoting the saying of Sydney Smith that a surgical operation is required to get a joke into a Scotsman's head. I inquired if he had meant an English joke and she said that no doubt this was so. I asked her if she credited the story of the Scot who had not been in London an hour when bang went sixpence, and she assured me that it might have happened, for she knew well how tempting the London shops were. I quoted to her the saying that the bagpipes sounded well if they were far enough away "and the farther away the better," but she pointed out pertinently that this was nonsense because if you were as far away as that you could not hear them at all.

Having thus established, quite without offence, the superiority of English humour, Miss xxx conductee me to the latticed, lavender-smelling chamber upstairs which had been James's bedroom



during his Eton holidays. This room was kept just as he had left it, and I found the walls specially interesting. Nailed upon them by himself were the many colours he had won at school, his Sixpenny, his Lower Club, his Fives Choice and several others. I was afterwards questioned incredulously at Eton about these decorations and asked whether any printed lists accompanied them. They did not, and the implication was that he had won no such honours and must have obtained these by pilfering. Even if so they still demonstrate his attachment to the venerable Foundation that lies under the shadow of Windsor.

She showed me a bundle of his school letters pathetically confined in a faded ribbon. To know oneself is notoriously difficult and perhaps the youthful James failed to do so. One gathers from these little outpourings that the reasons he got no prizes were (1) Mr. tutor's deplorable spite against him, (2) that he was devoting so much futile endeavour to correcting the morals of his fellows. He brings one terrible indictment against the Head. Several of the boys smoked (we are speaking of far back days), and James, in an uplifting of the spirit, to purge the house, felt it his duty to carry the names to the Head, who first swiped them, and then, telling them who had peached, concluded with the extraordinary words "Don't kick him in my presence." Some hours later James returned to the Head, pale and limping, to say finely, "I forgive you, sir," and, on being asked why, replied "Because I feel, sir, that in the ordinary course of nature you cannot be long spared to us," whereupon the



unaccountable man, instead of being touched, again swiped. The story would be unbelievable were it not vouched for by James's aunt, who had seen the marks on him. For his behaviour in this matter she increased his sock money at Little Brown's. It was pleasant to learn from another letter that James had not asked her to do this for his own stomach's sake, but to give treats to "skinnier youths who have not the luck to possess an aunt like mine." I advertised for other letters from James, promising to return them, but got no response. He seems never to have had a friend. James's last visit to his aunt occurred while he held a clerk-ship in the city, and it happened to be the famous fortnight when there were so many robberies in the village. Among those who suffered losses were Miss xxx and James himself. "I think I never admired him more," she told me, "than on that occasion, he was so brave and helpful." The villagers, it seems, had decided to appeal to Scotland Yard, but James dissuaded them, undertaking in the riskiest way to patrol the dark street alone, with an iron bar. He very nearly caught the evil-doers but not quite, and they continued to be active until he left, when the misdeeds ceased.

I am indebted to Mr. B. T. G. Jasper for an account of the last visit paid by Jas. Hook to his old school. Mr. Jasper, as I scarcely need to inform anyone who is familiar with the Eton of today, is one of those much respected old E<sup>s</sup> whom love for Eton has gently paralysed. In their last year at the school (or even earlier) they resolve to return as ushers, and the Eton boys, and the other boys promise in note-books to send



their sons to them. Frequently, owing to trouble with scholarships, they are not able to carry out this ambition, but, if they are of the bull-dog breed and have a competency, they often do go back and settle down there, with this sentiment for Eton as their profession, living a goloshes life and trying to think that they are still happy little scugs. They have a club, the Buttery (formerly Jordan's), and form perhaps one of the most charming of all exclusive coteries.

Mr. Jasper writes that on that evening he was walking to the club in Keate's Lane from his lodging at Windsor (which he has furnished exactly like an Eton room, with picture of a huntsman falling into a stream, a folding bed and a hat-box for the surreptitious concealment of coal). The evening was not wet but the trees were dripping, and he was in a dejected mood because it was past the lock-up hour and he had still, alas, the right to be at large. "The street," he continues, "seemed to be deserted, but as I approached the passage leading to the present rooms of the Eton Society I was conscious of a shadowy figure sitting motionless on the college wall, the low wall on which none may sit save Pops. In a moment, incredible as it may seem, I knew that I was in the presence of Jas. Hook, I had never before seen him in the flesh (which indeed is an inadequate term for his earthly tenement). His appearance I knew only by a poster on the London Underground, and he was now dressed very differently, in the incomparable garb of Pop. On his head he wore an irreproachable silk hat,



from which his long curls (so un-Etonian, but I suppose he had his crew to consider) dripped like black candles about to melt, and you may think I knew him from them, but I did not. Instead of a hand an iron hook protruded from the sleeve of his right arm, and you may think that it was by this I identified him but it was not. His face, cadaverous and wan, was of a hue on which blood of the colour that percolated from him when in conflict would not have been noticeable, but not even by that did I recognize him. All these details I observed anon in combination, but I knew him first as Hook by his extraordinary note of noblesse oblige. I do not mean merely that Etonian was written all over him; this was something even more than that, as if (May I venture?) he was two Etonians rolled by the magnanimous gods into one. In a word, the handsomest man I have ever seen, though at the same time perhaps slightly disgusting. I could understand how he had been known at Eton as Distingue Hook (afterwards corrupted into Stingy).

"My first impulse (for I always carry a kodak) was to photograph him, but the light was bad, though the moon had paused for a moment (which it often seems to me to do over Eton), as if awaiting some singular transaction. The photograph is imperfect, but I enclose you a copy for reproduction should such be your wish. I watched the solitary from the passage and I say that never could I have conceived a pyramid so Christian. That he was gazing with pe[r]rled



eyes through the darkness of his present to the innocence of his past, from the man he had become to the Pop he had been, was searchingly obviously, and the effect was heightened by the unclean drops from the trees which fell upon his face, sometimes to wander as they listed, sometimes to be wiped away by his hook. While I was wondering whether I ought to cover myself a policeman approached on the college side, and I saw his hook rise less in defence than for attack. I almost cried out, not for the sake of the policeman but because in my mind's eye I saw a newspaper heading damaging to England, "Murderous affair at Eton; arrest of an O.E." It shows how little even I, who also have "quaffed an over-dose of Parnassus," knows the stuff that our Eton "something" turns out. The policeman flashed his lantern, and this strange colloquy took place-

"Are you a Pop, sir," the policeman asked huskily, for he knew that every stone in the wall was listening. The unhappy man not only lowered his hook, but shocking to relate hid it behind his back.

After an agonising struggle, "No," he said. That is what he said. Once a Pop always a Pop, but for the honour of the school he denied his proud connection with it.

"Then you have no right to sit on that wall," the policeman said; "get off." All the stones in the wall said "Get off." Stingy Hook had merely to slue his right arm round to tear this fellow, but for the honour of the school he humbly got off the wall, his wall.



"Are you an O.E.?" the policeman enquired.

"N o," said Jas. Hook, being thus the first Old Etonian to deny that dear impeachment. But he did it for the honour of the school.

"Then make a move," the policeman said, and Hook (I swear to the truth of this) slunk away. It was all he could do for Eton, but he did it. To me it seemed so much that my face was streaked, though there were no trees on my side of the street. For an hour or more I searched for him, hesitating to find, but in my last sight of him he was slinking. He was an O.E. and he was slinking.

Thus Mr. Jasper, to whom my thanks are due. Hook, however, was seen later that night by various persons with whom I have conversed; once he was gazing long at the darkened windows of his tutor's house, no doubt picking out one particular room, his own, now silent in slumber ("oh that I were the happy dream that creeps to her soft heart"), and again sitting on Sheep's Bridge and wandering desolately round Dutchman's Farm. Probably the grimmest experience of the night went to a scug who was largely unconscious of it until enquiries by Mr. Jasper woke him to a sense of his peril and his importance. H e occupies a chamber which was formerly part of the meeting-place of Pop(now more splendidly housed), and he woke about midnight or later to find Hook sitting in his room. Addressed indignantly the intruder was meditating too profoundly to hear, and the boy was about to make another



remark when he fell asleep again. He will never be nearer to being torn apart like a piece of linen. In the morning he thought he had dreamt the visit, but he is now alive to his celebrity and would much like me to mention his name here, which for that reason I decline to do.

To the common criminal of the night it would be very difficult to invade undetected any of these hives of learning, and still more to enter that room without falling into it, for it is approached by several descending steps which begin suddenly with the opening of the door, and is therefore a sought-after room by boys who anticipate visits from their relatives. James, however, was no stranger to the old Pop room, and he must have come and gone as softly as snow. Whether his object was no more than to shed a delicious tear, or whether, thinking that this was still the club-room of the giants he sought it because he had a definite deed to do is matter for surmise, but later he certainly did break into the present premises of the Eton Society and abstract from its books the evidence that he had once been a member. All other evidence of his connection with Eton to which he could obtain access by hook or jemmy disappeared similarly that night. To obliterate the memory of himself from those tabernacles he had fouled was all this erring son of Eton could do for his beloved. Surely a more tortured revisit to Eton never disturbed her shades. No one saw the Solitary depart. Thus he vanishes, bleeding, from the scene.

His demise must have occurred not long afterward, but for a time the only reason in this country for fearing the untoward



was that he ceased to send a greeting to the school on the 4th of June. He had done this without fail, and it was always couched in the Latin tongue. I am indebted to the courtesy of the editors of the Eton Chronicle for permission to reprint.

has last salaam, - Gratissimus Almae Matris filius magistro inform.  
alumnis omnibus avete hoc IVto Iunii die ex Moluccis Iacobus Hook Flo-  
inform. et/reat Etona. Gradually it became known how he had

been destroyed by his dreadful foe. This was the only person of whom Miss x x x could not speak with charity. At his name her fingers twitched and her teeth sharpened. She always maintained that on securing possession of the ship he dressed in her nephew's clothing (cut down to fit him by the disreputable of his wanderings), and with a hook in his hand and a double cigar-holder in his mouth, strutted the deck using disgraceful language, a painful picture of James's conqueror which I have an uncomfortable feeling may be true.

Despite a circumstantial story, which is at least illustrative of the grandeur of his mind, that he bathed in diamonds, Hook left less property than might have been expected; his precious stones, the accumulation of years of toil, having been lost in a wretched competition among the crew of his successor about who could throw farthest. There came, however, eventually from an honest dive in Manaos a miscellaneous collection of his personal belongings, wrapped up in a shirt, and including a bag of doubloons and figures of eight, some jewelry such as is worn by small children of fashion, one spoon with the arms of Balliol College, Oxford, on it, a flute (an instrument on which he is said to have been a fair performer), the round top of a silk



hat with the word "Pop" stamped on it in sealing-wax, and a Commonplace Book containing many interesting entries. Among these recurs again and again the phrase "O mine enemy," showing that Jas ruminated uneasily and with intelligence over the hand that was in the fullness of time to strike him from the lists of Man. He seems to have had an idée fixe that this person and his associates could at will turn themselves into motes of dust dancing in the sun, an unfair advantage that made James's nights restless. The volume, which is in a dilapidated condition and bears witness to having spent some time in sea-water includes joltings, cries from the heart that he is alone among uncultured companions and about the barrenness of fame, and is not in its mournful cadences untinged by the melancholy of the Greeks in their greatest period. Compare one of the noblest passages in Sophocles upon the nothingness of everything with this terrible line "Better perhaps that Hook had never been born."

Of more interest to the vulgar, to whom this paper must after all make its chief appeal, will be Jas Hook's last Will, which was forwarded to his aunt by a shyster, or landshark, of Rio. By this he leaves everything to Eton, but in a covering letter he instructs her first to find out whether such a legacy would be pleasing to the <sup>me</sup>Gouverning Body, and, if not, to keep the treasure herself. The <sup>me</sup>Gouverning Body, it seems, had samples, and so all passed to Miss x x x, who told me with a faint flush that not to accept them would



have been a slight on James's memory. They were accordingly disposed, and with the proceeds she purchased various personal comforts ("things I am sure James would have liked me to have"), including a pianola.

This is all I have been able to learn about Jas Hook's private life. I seek to draw no moral, yet surely the proud though detestable position he attained affords one more proof that the Etonian is a national leader of men. Educationally, I gather from the Commonplace Book, his sympathies were with the classical rather than the modern side. In politics he was a Conservative. So far as I can discover, there never was any woman in his life, indeed it may be said with confidence that Jas Hook was universally loathed by both sexes. His furrow had therefore to be a solitary one. A dear woman might have made all the difference. Or perhaps it was just that at Oxford he fell among bad companions (Harrovians).

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